

Bus falls into gorge; 16 Amarnath pilgrims killed

PM mourns death; Rajnath held talks with Mehbooba on accident

RAMBAN / JAMMU, JULY 16 /- Sixteen Amarnath pilgrims were killed and around 27 injured, 19 of them critically, when a bus skidded off the Jammu Srinagar national highway and rolled into a deep nullah in the Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir today, officials said. The deceased belonged to UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, Assam, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh, they said. Two women were among the sixteen who died, they

added. A bus carrying pilgrims skidded off the road, turned turtle, and rolled down into the nullah at the Nachlana belt of Ramban late this afternoon, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Ramban, Mohan Lal said. The J&K State Road Transport Corporation (JKSRTC) bus was part of a convoy carrying 3,600 pilgrims from Jammu to the twin base-camps of Baltal and Pahalgam enroute the cave shrine of Amarnath in South Kashmir Himalayas,

police officials said. According to the officials, 16 persons, including two women, were killed and around 27 were injured in the accident. Nineteen injured pilgrims are being airlifted to Jammu for specialised treatment while eight have been admitted to the district hospital in Banihal, they said. Police, Army and CRPF, with help from locals, launched rescue operations and brought out the bodies and the injured persons from the nullah, they said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed pain at the loss of lives of in the accident. 'Extremely pained by Amarnath pilgrims in a bus

the loss of lives of Amarnath Yatriks due to a bus accident in J&K. My thoughts are with the families of the deceased,' Modi tweeted. "I pray that those injured in the bus accident in J&K recover soon," the prime minister added. Meanwhile, Union Home minister Rajnath Singh today spoke to Jammu and Kashmir Governor N N Vohra and Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti and took stock of the situation following the death of 16 Amarnath pilgrims in a bus

accident, officials said. During the telephonic conversation, the chief minister apprised the home minister on the accident of the bus carrying Amarnath pilgrims in Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir and the ongoing rescue operation. Mufti told Singh that the injured were being airlifted for treatment to Jammu. The government has set up a helpline for inquiry about the Amarnath pilgrims traveling in the bus that met with the accident in Ramban. The helpline numbers are -

091-2560401, and 0191-2542000. The home minister also had a telephonic conversation with the governor who has reached the accident site. Vohra too apprised him of the situation, officials said. "My heart goes out to the families of Amarnath Yatriks who lost their loved ones in the bus accident. My prayers are with the injured," the home minister tweeted. The victims of the accident belonged to different states, officials said. (PTI)



A rally was taken out first time in Naxalbari on Sunday demanding Gorkhaland-EOI

Kolkata police in B'desh over arrest of Burdwan blast accused

DHAKA, JULY 16 /- A Special Task Force of the Kolkata Police has held a meeting with Bangladeshi security officials here for information on arrested Jama'at al Mujahideen militant Sobel Mahfuz, wanted in India in the 2014 Burdwan blast case. The three-member team reached the capital city yesterday and met Bangladeshi security officials at the police headquarters, Assistant Inspector General Md Moniruzzaman said. In the meeting, they discussed information received so far during the interrogation of Neo-JMB militant Sobel Mahfuz, who was arrested along with three other militants by the Dhaka Metropolitan

Police's Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit from Chapsainawabganj district in northern Bangladesh on July 7. The officials from both countries also shared their experiences dealing with militant incidents in addition to information on Mahfuz, Moniruzzaman said as quoted as saying by the Daily Star. Mahfuz, a top explosives specialist of neo-JMB, is on a seven-day remand in the Dhaka cafe attack case. He allegedly supplied firearms and explosives for the cafe attack in which 22 people, including 17 foreigners, were killed.

Eight fuel tankers of IOC charred in Siliguri on Saturday night



petrol - caught fire, as senior police and fire brigade officials rushed to the spot.

SILIGURI, JULY 16 /- Eight fuel carriage tankers in the surrounding of the Indian Oil Corporation's storage depot at Shanti Nagar area here were charred in a fire on Saturday night, triggering panic and a few houses nearby were partly damaged. Five fire engines had to take hours to control the fire. In all eight tankers some carrying combustible fuels like kerosene, diesel and

Police and IOC officials were ascertaining the cause of the incident, amid suspicion that the tankers could have caught fire while miscreants were stealing oil. The fire had started in one tanker and spread to the others that had queued up to enter the storage depot. Some Totos (three-wheeler) and a Sumo were also damaged as the fire spread. The fire was brought under control around 1 am (Sunday).

Sikkim vehicle attacked in Siliguri Lathi-charge by police, tension till late night

PRASHANT ACHARYA

SILIGURI, JULY 16 /- A Sikkim vehicle was once again attacked by the local goons from Siliguri creating havoc throughout the night along Sevoke Road burning fire on the highway preventing goods vehicles to ply towards Sikkim and Darjeeling hills. Around 30 people ridded in several bikes stopping the Sikkim number jeep, vandalised it and heckled the driver. Later when police came the situation turned tenser, hundreds of youths started gathering in the area. Local miscreants carrying traditional iron bars, sticks, stones and bricks blocked the highway around 11 pm and stopped all the good vehicles by building fires on the highway. Journalists had to run from the area as the mob was attacking everyone includ-

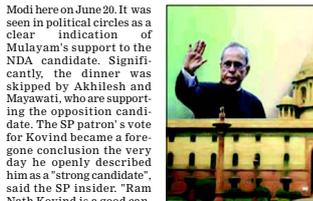


ing the police patrolling team. The situation being out of control, huge police force from Bhakti Nagar police station rushed to the area soon. Police had to charge batons to disperse the mob after miscreants started retailing on police forces. The Sikkim vehicle number SK 01 J2166 along with driver Akash Portel was then rescued by police and brought to police station. Portel said, "When I was proceeding towards Sikkim from Siliguri after loading goods a group of youths

came on 10 to 12 bikes near Sona Petrol pump forcefully stopped my vehicle and suddenly attacked with iron rods saying 'Sikkim ka gari hai maro', the 'gundas' then took me out of the vehicle and heckled me. I received great help from Bengal police as they came in a jeep and started chasing them but the goons were attacking police too." Meanwhile Gorkhaland supporters from Siliguri, Salugara and Milan More have appealed all the drivers of Sikkim and Darjeeling hills to take help of them before they proceed to hills. They have also suggested drivers not carry goods during night as it becomes difficult to help them.

Prez poll: SP divided in two camps, cross-voting likely

LUCKNOW, JULY 16 /- The Samajwadi Party appears divided on the eve of the presidential election with camps led by its patron Mulayam Singh Yadav and party chief Akhilesh Yadav all set to vote for rival candidates, triggering possibility of cross-voting. Though the division in the party may not have any bearing on the election result, it will certainly complicate the family feud further, said an SP insider, requesting anonymity. The sharp differences in the SP on the issue of presidential nominee was clear right from the day Ram Nath Kovind was chosen as the NDA nominee. Soon after the announcement of Kovind's name, Mulayam had attended a dinner hosted by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in honour of Prime Minister Narendra



Modi here on June 20. It was seen in political circles as a clear indication of Mulayam's support to the NDA candidate. Significantly, the dinner was skipped by Akhilesh and Mayawati, who are supporting the opposition candidate. The SP patron's vote for Kovind became a foregone conclusion the very day he openly described him as a "strong candidate", said the SP insider. "Ram Nath Kovind is a good candidate. I have a very old relations with him. BJP has selected a strong candidate. The most important thing is that the BJP has a majority" Mulayam had said on record. On expected times, Shiwaji, the warring uncle of Akhilesh, said that whatever his elder brother Mulayam decides was the last word for him, indicating that he too would back

should support Kumar." Ram Govind is also the Leader of the Opposition in the 403-member UP Lower House. In a written appeal circulated to all MLAs to vote for Kumar, Chaudhary said the presidential election has given one an opportunity to transcend petty politics and listen to the inner conscience. Shiwaji, meanwhile, has announced in Varanasi that he along with "several" SP MLAs and MPs will vote for Kovind. "Kovind has very good relations with netaji (Mulayam). He is a good man and the best candidate, Shiwaji, an MLA, said. "Netaji jo kahengey wahi hoga" (Whatever netaji says will happen)," he said. Shiwaji-loyalist Deepak Mishra, though not a voter, pledged "open support to Kovind" and thanked the

prime minister for his selection. The SP has five members in the Lok Sabha, including Mulayam, and 19 members in the Rajya Sabha, including Amar Singh, who is now an unattached member after his expulsion from the party, besides 47 MLAs in UP. Since members of the Legislative Council are not part of the electoral college, Akhilesh an MLC cannot vote, though his wife Dimple, a Lok Sabha member, is eligible to participate in the exercise. Mulayam was removed from the party's national president post and made a patron by Akhilesh in January at the peak of disaffection in the erstwhile ruling party which led to one of the most humiliating crushings the party suffered in the political history of Uttar Pradesh.(PTI)

Numbers beacon Kovind in Prez poll today; Kumar unlikely to be a pushover

NEW DELHI, JULY 16 /- Election for the next President of India will be held tomorrow where NDA candidate Ram Nath Kovind is pitted against opposition nominee Meira Kumar. The counting of votes will take place on July 20 in New Delhi where all the ballot boxes will be brought from various state capitals. The electorate, comprising elected Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members and members of state assemblies, is tilted in favour of the NDA, but the opposition is still working to seek support of some regional parties and their candidates. Both Kovind, a former Bihar Governor, and Kumar, the former Lok Sabha Speaker, were held a series of meetings across states to garner support for their candidature. The tenure of incumbent Pranab Mukherjee comes to an end on July 24. So far 13 stalwarts, including Mukherjee, have held the post. The electoral college which elects the President through the system of proportional representation, comprises MPs and members of state legislative assemblies. A total of 4996 voters - 4120 MLAs and 876 elected MPs - are eligible to cast their ballot. MLCs of states with legislative council are not part of the electoral college. While the Lok Sabha Speaker, an elected member, can vote, the two nominated members in the Lower House from the Anglo-Indian community cannot. Twelve nominated members in Rajya Sabha are also ineligible. Since the election is through a secret ballot, the parties cannot issue a whip to their members to vote for a particular candidate. A total of 13 vacancies in Lok Sabha and state assemblies will be filled up after the presidential elections. The NDA, led by the BJP has 5,37,883 votes includes the Shiv Sena, and the short-age is around 12,000 votes. But the promised support from the BJP, the TRS and the YSR Congress and likely backing from the AIADMK factions could offset the shortfall of the presidential votes by a substantial margin. In the 2012 elections, Pranab Mukherjee garnered 7,13,763 votes, while Pratibha Patil secured 6,38,116 votes in the previous polls in 2007. Both Mukherjee and Patil were Congress nominees. This time, the Lok Sabha secretary general is the returning officer. Last time, it was the secretary general of Rajya Sabha. A total of 32 polling stations - one in Parliament House and one each in the state legislative assemblies, have been set up. 33 observers have been appointed by the EC to oversee the conduct of election.

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